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Congressman

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Buyer Calls for Swift Action on Army Sexual Misconduct Allegations

Washington, D.C.— Congressman Steve Buyer (R-IN) on Tuesday was appointed by Chairman Floyd Spence to co-chair a delegation of members of the House National Security Committee to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in early December. Working with Congressman Buyer will be fellow committee member, Congresswoman Tillie Fowler, who has demonstrated instrumental leadership on the issue of women in the military. The purpose of the visit will be to review the Army's procedures for handling sexual misconduct at training installations. The delegation also expects to review these procedures at training bases for all the services. Buyer released the following statement:

"I am deeply concerned about the serious allegations of sexual abuse at U.S. Training Centers. These allegations, if true, represent not only serious criminal offenses, but egregious abuses of power and authority by soldiers placed in positions of tremendous trust. Such abuses, particularly in a training environment, are disturbing and completely unacceptable.

"I commend the Army for its open, swift, and aggressive investigation of these allegations. Based on my understanding of the Army's efforts to date, I am confident that the Army leadership is committed to determining how these serious violations could have occurred and to identify steps to prevent such abuse in the future.

"These incidents are contrary to the Army's culture. However, it is important for the Army to fully evaluate command climate, both at Aberdeen and at the other training centers where the most deplorable violations occurred. It is critical for the Army leadership to understand the circumstances that led these drill instructors to think they could behave this way and get by with it in order to implement effective preventive procedures. The Army needs to hold soldiers who violate Army policies and abuse leadership positions accountable for their criminal actions.

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“It is critical for Congress to exercise its Constitutional oversight responsibility in this situation. We need to take a hard look at whether this is simply a bizarre situation that got completely out of control, or whether it indicates a more significant problem - a breakdown of the Army leadership structure at the small unit level that permitted such a climate of abuse of authority to occur.

“It is disconcerting that many victims at Aberdeen said they did not feel comfortable reporting the incidents because they did not have confidence that their claims would be taken seriously by the chain of command or Army leadership. I would hope that the Army’s swift response in dealing with these allegations will show soldiers that the Army is committed to its no-tolerance policy, and will instill in them the confidence to report such abuses. I also would hope the Army would take a hard look at its efforts to communicate the various options, outside the chain of command that soldiers have for reporting these types of offenses - chaplains, equal opportunity officers, IG, etc.

“Based on the actions of a few individuals at Aberdeen and Fort Leonard Wood, I believe it is unfair and premature for us to condemn the whole military system. America has every reason to be confident of today’s Army. It is also premature for us to discuss legislative action before we fully understand the nature of the problem and the Army’s efforts to remedy it.”